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E.O. 12958: N/A  
TAGS: [IS KMDR MEDIA REACTION REPORT](#)  
SUBJECT: ISRAEL MEDIA REACTION

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SUBJECTS COVERED IN THIS REPORT:  
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- [1. Gaza Withdrawal Plan](#)
- [2. Greater Middle East Initiative](#)

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Key stories in the media:  
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All media reported that last night PM Sharon promised at the Likud convention that registered Likud members would get to vote on his Gaza disengagement plan. Ha'aretz says that Sharon's pledge "came under a hail of scathing criticism from the right as well as the left." Yediot published the results of a Mina Zemach (Dahaf) poll taken last night among registered Likud members: 51 percent support disengagement; 36 percent are opposed to it. A concurrent Maariv poll finds 51 percent in support of Sharon's plan, 39 percent opposed to it, while 10 percent are undecided.

Israel Radio quoted GOI sources in Jerusalem as saying that following Sharon's talks in Washington, the U.S. will recognize Israel's security needs, but not settlement blocs in the West Bank. Yediot filed a similar report based on "the draft" of an Israeli-American document. Jerusalem Post quoted Israeli diplomatic officials as saying that Israel's request that the U.S. formally reject the Palestinian demand for refugee repatriation in exchange for disengagement is likely to be finessed by a U.S. declaration for two states -- one for Jews, and one for Palestinians. Ha'aretz reported that Israel has asked the U.S. to provide official endorsement of the separation fence route, as part of the "benefits basket" which is to be provided in exchange for the implementation of the disengagement plan. The newspaper reported that this request was submitted as part of an attempt to satisfy conditions upon which Finance Minister Binyamin Netanyahu has predicated his support for the separation plan. Ha'aretz further reported that Thursday the three U.S. envoys -- William Burns, Elliott Abrams and Steve Hadley -- will finalize details of the compromise with Sharon. The newspaper reported that the USG is no longer lobbying for changes in the barrier's planned route. Ha'aretz reported that the compromise proposal was submitted by Defense Ministry D-G Amos Yaron in discussions with the U.S. envoys.

Jerusalem Post featured the story of a 15-year-old Palestinian, one of four Nablus boys to whom Islamic Jihad promised heaven in exchange for martyrdom as suicide bombers.

Leading media reported that Tuesday and today hundreds of members of the security forces clashed with settlers during the evacuation the Hazon settler outpost in the vicinity of Kiryat Arba, next to Hebron. IDF Radio and Israel Radio reported that this morning six policemen were injured by stones thrown during disturbances that broke out after members of the Ateret Kohanim movement entered homes they had purchased in the Palestinian village of Silwan (East Jerusalem).

Jerusalem Post reported that Tuesday cabinet minister Natan Sharansky wrote to the BBC that it employs a "gross double standard to the Jewish state" that smacks of anti-Semitism. He was reacting to its coverage of the IDF's arrest of a 16-year-old would-be suicide bomber last week, which the British corporation portrayed as "Israel's cynical manipulation of a Palestinian youngster for propaganda purposes."

All media, except the ultra-Orthodox newspapers,

reported that the Euroleague basketball championship will be played in Israel as planned next month despite security concerns. The media had reported on significant protests in Israel about the possibility that the games could be moved to Spain.

Ha'aretz cited a Bank of Israel report released Tuesday, according to which the Intifada has cost Israel between 31 billion shekels (around USD 6.9 billion) and 40 billion shekels (around USD 8.85 billion) so far, but not including defense costs. The amount comes to between 6.2 percent and 8 percent of the GDP. Maariv also cited the document.

Jerusalem Post reported that, in response to a petition signed last week by Palestinian intellectuals and activists calling for a peaceful intifada, 81 Palestinians issued a statement on Tuesday urging the Palestinians to continue the fight against Israel until they achieve all their rights.

All media reported that Tuesday the Haifa District Court charged Jewish terror suspect Eliran Golan with the attempted murder of Arab Knesset Member Issam Makhoul and at least three other people in the Haifa area. The court also charged Alex Rabinovitch with assistance in attempted murder, conspiracy and supplying Golan with bomb-making equipment. However, Golan denied that Rabinovitch had abetted him.

All media reported that Tuesday thousands of people took part in Land Day protests in the Israeli Arab sector, which came to pass without incidents.

Jerusalem Post quotes former Sharon adviser David Spector as saying that audio tapes, allegedly in the possession of Sharon's son Gilad, will incriminate his father and himself, and will strengthen the draft indictment against them once they are handed over to investigators, as demanded by the High Court of Justice.

Ha'aretz reported that, following the assassination of Sheikh Ahmed Yassin, the hosts of a scientific conference on desert dunes, which was supposed to be held in Layoun, Morocco, in ten days asked the three would-be Israeli participants not to come to the event. The European organizers of the conference and its French financial sponsors subsequently canceled it, citing their objection to discrimination.

Ha'aretz reported on a poll conducted by the Palestinian Center for Policy and Survey Research just before the assassination of Sheikh Ahmed Yassin: -53 percent of Palestinians support terrorist attacks against Israeli civilians (up from 48 percent last December). -27 percent support Hamas; 20 percent support Fatah; 40 percent refused to state a preference between the two movements. -"Are you in favor of Hamas conducting negotiations with Israel?" 54 percent are opposed, while 41 percent support the idea.

#### 1. Gaza Withdrawal Plan:

##### Summary:

Veteran op-ed writer and the late prime minister Yitzhak Rabin's assistant Eytan Haber opined in the lead editorial of mass-circulation, pluralist Yediot Aharonot: "From the moment the United States enters the picture, accepts the plan and supports it, it is also an American plan."

Political parties correspondent Yossi Verter wrote on page one of independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz: "Sharon ... will have to resign if his own party members reject his diplomatic initiative."

Senior columnist Nahum Barnea wrote on page one of Yediot Aharonot: "Sharon is presently at a low. The comfort is that he can only rise from here."

Conservative columnist Avraham Tirosh wrote in popular, pluralist Maariv: "It is extremely doubtful whether there is any point in Sharon traveling as a half-lame duck to meet the president of the U.S., in order to present a plan to him that could be erased from the public agenda within a few weeks along with its originator."

##### Block Quotes:

#### I. "We Will Meet on the Barricades"

Veteran op-ed writer and the late prime minister Yitzhak Rabin's assistant Eytan Haber opined in the lead editorial of mass-circulation, pluralist Yediot Aharonot (March 31): "Commentators will say: Sharon believes that the wishes of the registered Likud members are identical to the wishes of the general population of voters in Israel, who will support the disengagement plan en masse, according to public opinion polls. At the same time, the 3,000 Central Committee members are more militant and many of them are opposed to the disengagement plan. In other words, the Likud party members will carry out a 'bypass operation' on the Central Committee members. Sharon will then win and implement his plan. And if the Likud voters reject the plan at the polls? Then too, the plan will be implemented. Because from the moment the United States enters the picture, accepts the plan and supports it, it is also an American plan. In that case, no Israeli leader will dare stand up in the Oval Office and say: 'I am sorry, my constituency did not agree.' There will not be such a leader, because anyone who has ever reached the Prime Minister's Office and is familiar with the situation -- Israel's complete dependency on the U.S. from the standpoints of defense, foreign affairs and economic affairs -- knows that the Israeli leader has (almost) never been born who said 'no' to America, and the last one who behaved this way, Yitzhak Shamir, was sent into early retirement by the Americans with the support of the Israelis."

#### II. "Conceived in Sin"

Political parties correspondent Yossi Verter wrote on page one of independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz (March 31): "Prime Minister Ariel Sharon's decision to hold a vote among Likud members about his separation plan was reached in the usual faltering, belated manner. This time, however, there was a new twist. This time, Sharon's initiative was conceived in sin.... There were no counter-proposals, nor was there even an agenda. Senior Likud politicians who sat on the dais were stunned. 'I thought I knew a thing or two about politics,' said Knesset Speaker Reuven Rivlin last night. 'But there's always something new to be learned'.... The timetable for the referendum dovetails with the diplomatic and legal schedules.... Should Sharon dodge an indictment, and win majority support among Likud members for his separation plan, the pullout proposal would go to the government and Knesset for approval, and a unity government will come into existence. But should [Attorney General Menachem] Mazuz decide to indict Sharon, everything would be frozen. The same would happen if Sharon lost in the Likud poll -- he will have to resign if his own party members reject his diplomatic initiative."

#### III. "The Arbel Effect"

Senior columnist Nahum Barnea wrote on page one of Yediot Aharonot (March 31): "Sharon is a prime minister under duress. Aside from targeted killings, everything he has done on the Palestinian issue was done against his will: that is the way he built the fence, supported the road map and arrived at the withdrawal from Gaza. He knew he would have to get past President Bush, the Knesset, the cabinet, and perhaps the general electorate as well. He scorned the institutions of his party. But today's Sharon is not the man he used to be. That is the result of the Edna Arbel effect. [NB: Arbel is the country's State Attorney, who has recommended that Sharon be indicted.] He can pass political plans, with a tailwind from the United States, but the ability to scorn has been taken from him.... Sharon is presently at a low. The comfort is that he can only rise from here. A sample scenario: he travels to the U.S., does not receive many commitments ... but his encouraging photographs with the president, in rolled-up sleeves, in shirts open at the neck, in the rural landscape of Camp David, gladden the nation. Then comes a sweeping victory in the referendum, followed by the case being closed, accompanied by petitions to the High Court of Justice and a continuation of investigations in the Cyril Kern [corruption] affair, but is still a dynamic of victory. The Likud hears the voice of the people and remains united. With a little luck, the right wing ministers are also persuaded to stay (and if not, there is always Shimon Peres)."

#### IV. "Sharon's Time Is Up"

Conservative columnist Avraham Tirosh wrote in popular, pluralist Maariv (March 31): "It is extremely doubtful

whether there is any point in Sharon traveling as a half-lame duck to meet the president of the U.S., in order to present a plan to him that could be erased from the public agenda within a few weeks along with its originator. What is clear beyond a doubt is that even if he goes to Washington and receives Bush's blessing, Sharon will not be able to bring his plan before the cabinet for a vote before [Attorney General Menachem] Mazuz has spoken his piece. He is now the boss who determines the schedule, and in fact the future of the diplomatic initiatives in the region. He and not Sharon, he and not Bush.... There is no longer confidence [among the Israeli public] in the man himself, as the polls show, apparently due to these [alleged corruption] affairs.... In its present situation, Israel needs a prime minister with a clean head and even cleaner hands."

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12. Greater Middle East Initiative:  
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Summary:  
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Conservative, independent Jerusalem Post editorialized: "The more forcefully the Bush administration advocates [reforms in the Arab world], the more it will put repressive Arab regimes on the defensive, and the more courage it will give to the best elements in Arab society."

Block Quotes:  
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"Arab Reform Now"

Conservative, independent Jerusalem Post editorialized (March 31): "It strikes us [The Jerusalem Post] as strange, to say the least, that the establishment of an effective and representative legislature in, say, Yemen, hinges on developments in Israel. It is said that the Israeli-Palestinian conflict provides Arab regimes with an alibi not to reform. Perhaps, but that would seem to suggest an interest among Arab despots in perpetuating the conflict, not resolving it. At any rate, why should the political freedoms of Arab peoples be captive to what arch-enemy Israel does or does not do?.... Among the conclusions the Bush administration drew from September 11 was that the risks of inaction outweighed the risks of action; that advocating stability above freedom in the Middle East was counterproductive, hypocritical, and unworthy of the United States; and that reforming the Arab world was a sine qua non for defeating terrorism. We believe these conclusions are correct. The more forcefully the Bush administration advocates them, the more it will put repressive Arab regimes on the defensive, and the more courage it will give to the best elements in Arab society. As policy goes, this may be simplistic, but it's the only approach that's likely to succeed."

KURTZER